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THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF
Governor Alexander Martin,
BY
ROBERT M. DOUGLAS, A. M., LL. D.,
Greensboro, N. C.

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ADDRESS

OF

ROBERT M. DOUGLAS, A. M., LL. D.,

UPON THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF

GOVERNOR ALEXANDER MARTIN.

Delivered at the Annual Celebration of the Battle

of Guilford Court House, July 4, 1898.

MR. PRESIDENT:

We meet here to-day to celebrate the anniversary of a nation's birth on a spot consecrated by the life blood of her faithful sons freely given in her defense in the weakest hour of her infancy.

It is hard to realize that only one hundred and twenty-two years have passed since that starry flag was first given to the free air of its native heaven. To-day it floats on every sea, representing a nation whose material power dominates the western hemisphere, and casts its broadening shadow across the world. Infinitely greater is the influence of the moral principles which it represents as the emblem of the most perfect union of liberty and of law that the world has ever seen.

A careful study of the birth, growth and decline of the great nations and peoples within historic times, which seem to have been regulated by some fixed laws whose nature we cannot comprehend, but whose existence we are forced to admit, plainly indicates that we are yet far from the meridian of our national life. What our future may be, no human judgment can foretell; but I have a firm conviction that the future destinies of the world are in the hands of the English speaking people. One in blood and in language, governed substantially by the same laws and moved by the same high aspirations, sep-

arated alone by the natural landmarks that define the limits of their respective influence, they will go on together in perfect harmony, in the accomplishment of their great mission, with a single purpose and perhaps to a common destiny.

Already the magnificent empire of Spain has gone to decay, and her imperial power lies with her sunken fleet in Manila Bay, both mere memories of the past. She is still keeping up a hopeless contest for dynastic reasons, but Sampson's guns are tolling the death-knell of her dominion on the great continent she once claimed by right of discovery and of conquest.

Whatever may be the results of this war as to territorial expansion, it was entered into with evident reluctance by the American people, and only from the highest sense of national duty and self defense. Once in, we know but one way out.

Terrible as war must always be, it has its compensations in the patriotism it engenders and the heroism it develops. In spite of our sorrow, we cannot but feel a mournful pride that North Carolina, ever last in the quarrel and first in the fight, offered up the first sacrifice upon the altar of our re-united land.

Our own Worth Bagley, brave as the bravest, and tender, loving and true as becomes the brave, standing at the post of duty and smiling gently in the face of danger, calmly met the embrace of death.

Nations, like individuals, have their infancy as well as their manhood; and the patriot who guards the cradle of a new born state, deserves fully as much as the hero who follows its conquering banner in the full tide of its imperial power. Rome, stern, heroic Rome, not only deified her founder; but held in the highest veneration and perpetuated in the most enduring form, the memory of the she-wolf which suckled him in his helpless infancy on the Palatine Hill.

The glorious victory of Manila, unparalleled in its com-

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Col. J. M. Morehead
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pleteness, was not as important in itself or in its effect upon the destinies of mankind, as the battle of Guilford Court House. Had there been no Guilford Court House, there would have been no Yorktown; and had there been no Yorktown, there would have been no Manila. The roar of Dewey's 8 inch guns was, in historic result, but the echo of the squirrel rifles fired across yonder field by the Guilford militia.

Since the devoted labors of Judge Schenck, the founder of our Association and the restorer of the battlefield, but little is left to be said about the battle itself; and so it has become usual for the annual orator to select some revolutionary personage as the subject of his address. Custom, as well as a certain degree of necessity, has generally imposed this duty upon some kinsman of the patriot dead.

As the old Romans thought the duty of eulogy rested upon the nearest surviving relative, under the idea that he was best qualified to speak of the virtues of the deceased; so it is thought that those who proudly claim their kindred blood will make the greater effort to collect from the scattered and exceedingly imperfect records of that period, the necessary facts to perpetuate the memory of our illustrious dead. Thus I am here to-day to give a brief outline of the life and character of Governor Alexander Martin.

I trust you will do me the justice to remember that this is the fourth of July, and that a long historical dissertation would wear out my welcome. Moreover, a full record of the life of one who was for so many years the directing power of the State, would be, for that period, almost the history of the state itself. Therefore the merest outline must suffice.

The founder of the family in America was Hugh Martin, a Presbyterian minister, who emigrated from County Tyrone, Ireland, in 1721, and settled in Hunterdon county, New Jersey, where his five sons were born. They

were Alexander, James, Thomas, Samuel and Robert, the Governor being the eldest and Robert, my great-grandfather, being the youngest. The five brothers came South shortly before the Revolution, and settled in Virginia; but all except Thomas soon afterwards removed to North Carolina.

Alexander was born in 1740, and graduated at Princeton University, then Nassau Hall, in 1756, at the age of sixteen. His scholarship must have been remarkably fine, as shown not only by the fact of his graduation at so early an age, but from the further fact that his staid old Alma Mater conferred upon him, in the midst of a busy life, the highest honor she could bestow, the degree of Doctor of Laws. (LL. D.)

In 1772 he settled at Guilford Court House, which was then situated less than a mile east from here, near the edge of the battlefield, and was subsequently named Martinsville in his honor. When the battle was fought he was a member of the Council Extraordinary. He must have become a citizen of the state before 1771, as Foote and Moore both state that he and Rev. Dr. David Caldwell were present at the battle of the Alamance, and made fruitless appeals to both sides for peace. That a young stranger should have been selected to accompany that eminent divine upon so difficult, dangerous and thankless an undertaking, was the highest tribute to his personal character, judgment and patriotism.

In 1771 he was apparently a resident of Rowan County, as his name appears among the officers of that county, signed to an agreement dated March 7, 1771, with the Committee of the Regulators to submit all matters of grievance to arbitration. What office he held does not appear from the paper; but Rumple, in his History of Rowan County, says that he lived in Salisbury until Guilford County was erected, and that he was frequently commissioned by the Crown to hold the District Court at Salis-

bury, having presided over that court as late as the first day of June, 1775.

On March 18, 1771, he and Colonel John Frohock wrote to Governor Tryon giving an account of their agreement with the Regulators, and urging a policy of justice and conciliation. The answer of Tryon was extremely sarcastic, written in the pride and insolence of power to one whom he never dreamed would, by the choice of a free people, be his successor in the glorious years to come.

In his letter of April 12, 1771, to the Earl of Hillsboro, Governor Tryon speaks of Alexander Martin as "*Colonel Martin*." So at that early age Martin was evidently a man of position and influence.

In 1774 and 1775 he was a member of the Colonial Assembly from Guilford County. He was appointed Lieutenant Colonel of the Second Regiment from this State in the Continental line on September 1st, 1775, and was promoted to the Colonelcy of the same regiment on April 10, 1776, which he held until November 22, 1777 when he resigned.

Wheeler says that: "He, with his regiment, was in the battle of Brandywine, 11th September, 1775, where Lafayette was wounded; and was near him when he received the wound. In the attack of Washington on the British at Germantown, October 4th, 1777, he was present when his General, Francis Nash, was killed." In 1779 he was elected state senator from Guilford County, and again in 1780, 1781, 1782, 1785, 1787, and 1788. In 1780 he was elected Speaker of the Senate, and again in 1781 and 1782, as we then had no Lieutenant-Governor, an office which was not created until the Constitution of 1868.

After the terrible disasters occurring in the South during the year 1780, the Legislature meeting in September, created a Board of War "to direct and control the military of the state," and elected as its members Governor

Martin, John Penn and Oroondates Davis. Of this remarkable body, whose powers seem to have been as ample as they were undefined, Governor Martin was the Chairman and admittedly its dominating spirit.

Gov. Graham, in his admirable historical lecture delivered at New York in 1858, in speaking of this Board and its members, says that its creation "was utterly at variance with the plain precepts of the Constitution"; but that its members "undertook the task devolved upon them in the most devoted spirit of patriotism, and with a proper sense of its magnitude, and executed its duties with fearlessness, ability and eminent public benefit." Stronger commendation could not come from a higher source.

In the following year the Board of War was discontinued, and a "Council Extraordinary" created, who, with the Governor (Nash), were invested with the powers of government during the recess of the Legislature, and indefinitely if the invasion of the enemy should prevent the holding of elections and the meeting of the Assembly at the usual time. This Council was composed of Governor Martin, Governor Caswell and Mr. Bignall.

It is a sad commentary upon the condition of our early records, that I have been utterly unable to ascertain how long this truly extraordinary body remained in existence, or what it did, if anything. Wheeler makes no allusion to it whatever in his history, while Moore merely mentions its creation, and does not even include it in his index.

Our State Records are now being compiled and published, but the latest volume has not yet reached this period of our history.

I suspect the Council did nothing, but for what reason it is difficult to say. Governor Caswell, great and patriotic as he was, was a man of fixed views and strong prejudices, and for some reason was personally antagonistic to Governor Martin. It may be that Caswell, having as Major General been in command of the entire body of

State militia, expected the Council merely to register his will. If so, he found in Martin a man who not only was his equal in other respects, but possessed the advantage of a calmer judgment and a steadier temper.

It is truly unfortunate if the divergent views of these two great men prevented them from giving to the state they loved so well, the full measure of service of their great intellects and loyal hearts.

Upon the capture of Governor Burke, by Fannin in September, 1881, ¹⁷⁸¹ Governor Martin, by virtue of his office as Speaker of the Senate, succeeded to the Governorship, and became in name as well as in fact the head of the state government. Governor Burke returned the following year, and resumed his office for the remainder of his term; but was soon again succeeded by Gov. Martin, who was elected in the Fall of 1782 and again in 1783.

The Constitution of 1776 provided that: "The Senate and House of Commons jointly, at their first meeting after each annual election, shall, by ballot, elect a Governor for one year, who *shall not be eligible to that office longer than three years in six successive years.* This provision compelled the retirement of Governor Martin at the end of the year 1784. He was immediately re-elected as Senator from Guilford County, and was again made Speaker of that body, succeeding Governor Caswell, who had succeeded him as Governor.

In 1786 he was elected by joint ballot of the two houses of the General Assembly one of the five delegates to the Federal Convention called to meet in Philadelphia to frame the Constitution of the United States. This convention convened on Friday, May 25th, 1787, and among those present Governor Martin's name appears first among the delegates from North Carolina, on page 139 of volume 1 of Elliott's Debates. As usual with all his duties, he took an active and intelligent part in its proceedings; but for some reason both he and William R. Davie were absent when the Constitution was signed,

and hence their names do not appear to that immortal instrument in the formation of which they took so deep an interest, and the ultimate adoption of which by their own state was so largely due to their efforts. In the same year Governor Martin was again elected to the State Senate, and again became its presiding officer. At that time this position was much more important than at present, and was universally regarded as second only to the Governor in dignity and influence.

This Legislature called a Constitutional Convention to meet at Hillsborough in July 1788, to consider the adoption of the Federal Constitution. Governor Martin was a candidate for the Convention, but was defeated by his old friend Doctor David Caldwell, who was an intense Republican, as the followers of Jefferson then called themselves, and bitterly opposed to the adoption of the Constitution.

The defeat of Martin was practically the defeat of the Constitution for the time being; as the Convention by a vote of 184 to 84, more than a two-thirds majority, determined neither to adopt nor reject the Constitution, but simply to recommend a bill of rights and *twenty-six* amendments; and it then adjourned sine die to await the action of the other states.

Gov. Martin was immediately returned to the State Senate, and again elected Speaker. No stronger proof of the stern independence of the stalwart yeomanry of Guilford County could have been given than their opposition to the Federal Constitution in spite of the earnest appeals of their great countyman, whom they always loved, honored and trusted. That trust was never betrayed, and that love and confidence were never lost.

The Constitution having been adopted by a majority of the states, the government of the United States went into operation in the Spring of 1789. The fourth day of March was set for the meeting of Congress; but a quorum of the Senate was not obtained until April 6th, and General

Washington was not inaugurated as President until the 30th day of April.

Prompt action on the part of North Carolina became imperative, and a new Constitutional Convention was called. Both the Convention and the General Assembly met at Fayetteville on November 2nd, 1789.

The Federal Constitution was adopted, and Governor Johnston and Benjamin Hawkins were elected Senators. This necessitated the immediate election of Governor, an office then regarded as of greater dignity and importance than that of Senator, as he was the head of the sovereign state of which the Senator was only one of the representatives. In fact Mr. Jefferson regarded the Governors of the respective states as the only officials whose visits the President could be expected to return.

It is impossible for us to realize the extreme reluctance and grave misgivings with which this state entered the Federal Union. A republic formed by the voluntary aggregation of sovereign states, widely separated and of diverse internal interests, was an untried experiment in the history of the world. All the republics and democracies of former times had virtually been confined in their governing power to their dominating cities. The Roman republic was simply the republic of Rome. The city was the creator of the republic, and was properly called "the mistress of the world". Here the National government was the creature of pre-existing states, and to call Washington City the mistress of this country would be a pure absurdity.

North Carolina had many illustrious men from whom to choose her Chief Executive; but she felt the need of her strongest son, one not only of proved loyalty and ability, but one whose calm judgment and steady hand could be trusted to guide the infant ship of state through the stormy billows that hid the horizon. In this hour of supremest trial the heart and mind of the people turned to Alexander Martin.

He was immediately elected Governor, and the Old North State began her magnificent career as one of the United States of America under his directing hand. He was again elected Governor in 1790 and again in 1791, thus for the second time serving out the full number of terms allowed by the Constitution.

Six times Governor of this state, once by succession and *five times* by direct election, Governor Martin has left a record that has never been equalled and seldom approached. Governor Caswell was elected four times and Governor Vance three times.

Of Martin's wonderful career as Governor, Colonel Wheeler, whose extreme Jeffersonian leaning made him by no means partial to our great Federalist, simply says, on page 182 of his history: "He (Alexander Martin) conducted the affairs of the State in a troubled and perilous period with great dignity, unswerving fidelity and scrupulous integrity." Justice could say no less, and eulogy need say no more.

In 1793 Governor Martin was elected to the Senate of the United States, and served his term with his habitual ability, fidelity and distinction. While not agreeing with the extreme views of Hamilton, he was a staunch Federalist, and a devoted follower of Washington, whose personal friendship he so long enjoyed.

In the childhood of a nation its people are more impulsive and less conservative than in its more mature development. It may be the want of national experience, and perhaps to a greater extent, the disruptive influence inseparable from successful revolution. It is a realization of this fact that has lead the students of history to a more thorough appreciation of the sublime character of Washington, who was far greater in his restraining influence over the dangerous elements of the country than in his more brilliant achievements. As a successful general, and even as the founder of a mighty nation, he may be surpassed by others; but in his formative influence upon

the character of a great and noble people, he has no superior in history, and but one rival in Alfred the Great.

The principles of the French Revolution, for the time being, exercised a wonderful influence over the American people, in some sections endangering the existence of organized government, and even threatening the foundations of the Christian faith. No Irishman, whether Catholic or Protestant, has any toleration for infidelity; and while he may not live up to the doctrines of his Church, he is always ready to fight for them. Governor Martin from his seat in the Senate, saw the threatening dangers, and regardless of personal consequences, sternly faced the gathering storm. He may have underestimated the ultimate conservatism of the people, and doubted too much Jefferson's ability to control the dangerous elements he had aroused, but he did the right as he was given to see the right.

With his lofty patriotism, deep convictions and strong character, he could not do otherwise. He was Alexander Martin; and while the willow may bend, the oak must stand or fall. He strongly supported Adams' administration, voted for the Alien and Sedition acts, and at the end of his term retired to private life with the great party to which he belonged.

Moore's history on page 428 of volume 1, says that Jesse Franklin succeeded Bloodworth as Senator in 1798. This is a mistake. Franklin succeeded Martin, and took his seat on December 30th, 1800, as shown on page 21 of the Annals of Congress for the first session of the Sixth Congress.

About 1789 Governor Martin moved his residence to the new county of Rockingham, which was cut off from Guilford in 1785, and thereafter resided on a plantation, to which he gave the name of Danbury, situated on the south bank of Dan River, at the mouth of Jacobs' Creek. Here he lived until his death in 1807, possessing ample

means and exercising the most generous hospitality. Among his guests was General Washington, who spent several days with him on his return from his Southern trip in 1790, arriving there about the first week in June of 1791.

They had long been friends. Besides having been United States Senator during Washington's entire second term, during which he strongly supported his administration, he had served under him during the War. Upon his leaving the army General Washington presented to him a pair of silver cups. One of the cups now belongs to Colonel James Martin, of Winston, N. C., who is a lineal descendant of the gallant Colonel James Martin who commanded the Guilford militia under Greene, and who was Governor Martin's brother. This cup is now on the desk before me.

Governor Martin was always a warm friend of our State University. As Governor he earnestly recommended its support by the State. In 1790 he became one of its trustees, and remained so until his death. He was President of the Board of Trustees in 1792-3, but gave up this position upon his election to the U. S. Senate. Another proof of his wonderful popularity is shown in the action of the Legislature, which promptly struck from the map of North Carolina the names of the counties of Tryon, Bute and Dobbs, and yet retained the name of Martin County, although it had been named in honor of Josiah Martin, the Royal Governor. No one would raise his hand against a name that stood so high on the patriot roll.

Governor Martin represented Rockingham County in the Senate in 1804 and 1805. It may seem strange to some that one who had so repeatedly held such high positions should, in his old age, be willing to go again to the Legislature; but his fellow citizens knew well the incalculable benefit of being represented by one of his great ability, exalted character and long experience;

while with him the post of duty was the post of honor. That he was again elected president of the Senate showed that he retained to the last the respect and confidence of his fellow men.

Like others of our greatest men, the character of Governor Martin exhibited some apparent inconsistencies. The brave old patriot, whose life was full of heroic and successful effort, and whose distinguishing characteristic was strength,—stern, dominating, matchless strength,—in his hours of relaxation relapsed into the quiet poet-dreamer, wandering along the leafy banks of the Dan, and writing verses.

This brings us to another phase of human character which recalls a remark made by my father when I was a boy. It then made a deep impression on my mind, which has been strengthened by the observation and reflection of maturer years. He was discussing the character of General Winfield Scott in connection with his celebrated "Hasty plate of soup" dispatch, and remarked that his experience had shown that even the greatest men generally prided themselves upon the particular qualities which they did not happen to possess. Governor Martin, by the practical consensus of contemporaneous judgment, eminent as soldier, patriot, statesman and scholar, thought that he was a poet. I regret to say that the deliberate judgment of posterity is that in this view he was mistaken. His ode on the death of General Francis Nash and lines on the death of Gov. Caswell have been published in the *University Magazine*, and have been highly praised for their patriotism. His admiring kinsmen console themselves with the idea that his best poems must have been lost.

Upon his death in 1807, his body was placed in a vault constructed in a beautiful wooded bluff overlooking the river. Here his remains rested in peace for thirty or forty years, until a great freshet in the river caused the water to rise above the level of the vault, into which it

flowed. He was devoted to the river; and it seemed strangely pathetic that its waters should, after so many years, come as if to take once more in their fond embrace all that remained of him it loved so well, "grieving, if aught inanimate e'er grieves over the unreturning brave." As the vault was injured, his remains were moved and buried elsewhere, but at what spot no one seems to know, and it is impossible to obtain even a clue from the conflicting statements. It is a singular coincidence that he and General Greene should both sleep in unknown graves.

A contemporary, writing of Governor Martin, says that: "He was about five feet nine or ten inches in height, well formed and fine featured." I have a large photograph of him taken from an original portrait also in the possession of Colonel Martin. The head is large and well shaped, and has the poise of conscious strength. The face is strong and attractive. The nose is long and straight, with full thin nostrils. The forehead is not unusually high, but is broad and well developed. The jaw is square and massive, indicating, with the firm straight lips, extraordinary force of character, with an inflexible will and great concentration of purpose. The lips seem to be slightly compressed, which is sometimes the result of the habitual effort of self-control. The eyes, which are large and wide apart, are looking straight at you and apparently through you, from lids that are slightly closed. It is not the laughing eye of Erin, whose wrath "a word can kindle and a word assuage." It is rather the calm eye of the frontiersman, long used to danger for which it was ever watchful, but from which it never shrank.

The entire expression is one of repose; but there is something which suggests:

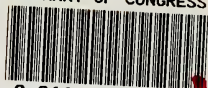
"That underneath that face like summer ocean's,
Its lip as moveless and its cheek as clear,
Slumbers a whirlwind of the heart's emotions,
Love, hatred—pride, hope, sorrow—all save fear."

Governor Martin, like all strong men, had his enemies; but he brushed them aside with too much indifference to leave any record of his defense. He has since had detractors even among self-styled historians; but no defense or vindication is necessary of one for whom the patriots of the Revolution thought no honor too high, and in whom George Washington could find a kindred spirit.

From this cup, sanctified by the lips of the Father of his Country in the pledge of friendship to my honored kinsman, and now filled with pure water from the spring that quenched the dying thirst of the heroes who fell upon this field, I drink in the deepest reverence, to the memory of the Deathless Dead.



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